

*Carmel, NY* – In an effort to encourage environmentally responsible practices on actively farmed muck soil land, Congressman John Hall (NY-19) and Senator Kristen Gillibrand (NY) introduced the Conservation on Muck Soils bill today in both the House of Representatives and Senate. The bill would reward onion growers in the Hudson Valley who engage in responsible conservation practices, as well as farmers in other parts of the country.

Muck soil is a special type of soil farmed to produce onions, potatoes, lettuce, celery, and other specialty crops. This soil develops a thick organic layer of topsoil that is highly vulnerable to erosion when the lands are exposed to air.

“Hudson Valley farmers are an important part of the region’s economy and meetings with them brought this problem to light,” said Rep. Hall. “The farmers were extremely helpful in suggesting ways that the problem could be addressed. Creating a program that recognizes the unique nature of farming on muck soil can help to make sure that we’re taking smart, efficient steps to protect our water and soil and help keep farmers in business. This is a great example of constituents’ voices influencing policy on the national level.”

“Our muck soil vegetable and fruit farmers are historically underserved,” Senator Gillibrand said. “The COMS program would promote good conservation practices while keeping valuable lands in farming production. Crops grown in muck soil produce high yields and require significantly less commercial fertilizers than crops grown on other soil types. Being such a highly valuable natural resource, which produces bountiful yields of various vegetables and fruits, we must give muck soil significant attention and protection.”

The existing CREP program attempts to prevent soil erosion and protect water quality through a program that allows voluntary retirement of farm land. In order to obtain conservation payments, the CREP program requires farmers to enter into 10-to-15 year agreements to remove qualifying land from agricultural production. In many instances, this aspect of the program has created unintended consequences, including the retirement of specialized, productive soil from farming and a lack of land management leading to weed and pest threats on neighboring lands.

The Hall and Gillibrand bills would implement a Conservation on Muck Soils (COMS) program to meet the specific needs of muck land soil crops such as the onions grown in Orange County. The program would reward anti-erosion and cover crop practices while addressing

shortcomings under the current Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) to help encourage ongoing production.

“Congressman Hall and Senator Gillibrand have been outstanding supporters of agriculture and friends of the farmers of the black dirt region and the Hudson Valley,” said Orange County grower and farming advocate Chris Pawelski. “They saw a problem caused by an ill conceived federal program, the CREP program. They took the next step of creating an innovative program that would not only mitigate the unintended consequences of the CREP but it is a genuine soil conservation program that is a WORKING FARMS program. Smart public policy encourages conservation and continued food production. Farmers are very fortunate to have Congressman Hall and Senator Gillibrand fighting for us on Capitol Hill.”

Congressman Hall has been a champion of muck soil growers in the Hudson Valley and across the country recognizing they have specialized needs that cannot be fully met by a one-size-fits-all federal program. Since joining Congress Hall has successfully introduced similar legislation as amendments to the 2007 and 2008 Farm Bills.